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Film-maker's use of JFK exhibit worries officials

By Mark Potok
OF THE TIMES HERALD STAFF

Director Oliver Stone's production crew calls it nothing more than movie magic, but some county officials appear to be balking at letting the Oscar-winning film-maker move parts of The Sixth Floor museum to accommodate filming of a movie about the Kennedy assassination.

The crew has asked to make temporary changes to the outside of the county administration building, the former Texas School Book Depository, and little opposition seems to have surfaced. But the film-makers also have proposed moving all or parts of the museum exhibit on the structure's sixth floor, and that has some officials worried.

"I do not want the exhibit closed for any period of time for them or anyone else," said Dallas County Commissioner Chris Semos, who expects to vote on parts of the proposal with other commissioners Tuesday.

"The exhibit is open every day except Christmas, and that's the way it should be," he said. "People come from all over the world, and they don't need to find it closed."

Producer Alex Ho said Friday that none of the proposed changes would harm the building or the museum exhibit, and argued that the filming will bring many benefits to Dallas. He also indicated a willingness to make changes to accommodate commissioners' concerns.

"It's only a magic act," Ho said. "It's not going to damage the building."

Semos said he does not expect opposition to the changes proposed for the outside of the building, from which Lee Harvey Oswald shot President John F. Kennedy. Fake plastic foam bricks and other cosmetic changes are planned to make it look as it did on Nov. 22, 1963.

But Semos and other officials are worried by what Ho wants to do inside the museum. The production company has proposed three alternatives to the county commissioners and the Dallas County Historical Foundation, which runs the museum.

The first involves packing up the entire exhibit but leaving it on the sixth floor. The museum's contents would be reproduced and installed on the seventh floor, while about three weeks of filming went on on the sixth floor. The second and third involve clearing smaller portions of the sixth floor and using it for seven or three days.

Foundation director Bob Hays said he is worried about moving major parts of the exhibit. "It took us an awfully long time to put that exhibit in. It's put in there with shims and all kinds of things. The floor is real uneven. . . . We're a little dubious."

Semos said he expects the vote Tuesday to be close. "If it passes it will probably be a 3-2 vote," he said of the proposals. "And if it fails, it will be 3-2."